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ABSTRACT

As Latin American literature progressively enters into the English curriculum, two writers deserve special commentary for their representative contribution to the literary world. Through their works, the Columbian author, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and the Peruvian author, Mario Vargas Llosa clearly convey the Latin American writer's desire to be modern as they confront sociological problems and integrate a discussion of social, political, and economic issues. Garcia Marquez's "One Hundred Years of Solitude" is a classic example of the innovative production generated by the Latin American literary "boom" of the 1960s. The novel best exemplifies Garcia Marquez's ingenious mixture of realism and fantasy and has resulted in the creation of a total fictional universe in which the commonplace takes on an aura of magic and the impossible is made believable. In his numerous novels, Vargas Llosa struggles to capture the complexity inherent in diverse personal, social, and historical worlds. Structural complexities are combined with stories that exemplify Vargas Llosa's view of life; for him it is violent, chaotic, complex, absurd, and indefinable. Both writers as well as a rich literary production by Latin American women writers will no doubt enrich the English Curriculum in the decades to come with innovative courses in translation as American students become more interested in developing a closer bond with Latin American countries and their societies. (An appendix contains available works, some in translation, by 10 contemporary Latin American writers; 18 references are attached.) (KEH)

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Canonizing Latin American Literature: Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa Enter the English Curriculum[1]

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Since the quality of a number of Latin American writers is finally being recognized by an American audience, I would like to add to that growing number the novelists Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa. Both writers have earned universal recognition and their novels have been translated into many languages, particularly English. Their works have a place in the reading lists of university students in the humanities and have been viewed from different perspectives by critics. Thus, Latin American literature is progressively entering into the English curriculum and has enriched the corpus of world literature. I will focus this paper on these two authors and their works, discussing both their impact on the English Curriculum and their importance to Latin American Literature and its role in our American universities in the 1990's.

Latin American Literature has played an important role in the 20th century. Through the years, Latin American authors have confronted sociological problems and integrated a discussion of

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social, political, and economic issues with their verbal art to establish their own identity and achieve world recognition. Although Latin American literary production has been centered on realism, the number of literary works that appeared in the 1960's spawned a literary phenomenon known as the "boom," referring to the number of outstanding novels written during this decade. Latin American Literature continues to dominate Hispanic literary production and has acquired a recognized presence in the United States. In universities where Spanish-American literature has been a major component in Hispanic Studies novels of the boom period have excited the interest not only of Hispanists but also of scholars in other literatures and disciplines.

To be prophetic for a moment, the number of distinguished Latin American writers from the 1990's into the next century whose works will enlarge the canon of Latin American literature, will not be limited to the works of writers like Jorge Luis Borges and Ernesto Cardenal, but will include a richer literary production by Latin American Women writers who are slowly gaining access to a new reading public: Isabel Allende, Rosario Ferré, Luisa Valenzuela, and Elena Poniatowska among others. This major gender shift in Latin American Literature will no doubt enrich the English curriculum in the next century with some innovative courses in translation, and develop a new interest in comparative literature as the English-speaking nations in general and American students in particular become more interested in developing a closer bond with Latin American countries and their societies. And one cannot ignore the obvious feminist interest in these women novelists.

Now for the specifics. García Márquez's and Vargas Llosa's works continue to be universally popular. Gabriel García Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude (Cien años de soledad) is considered to be one of the most popular novels in our times and has been well received by the American literary reader. This novel since its publication in 1967 has provoked an international awareness and interest in the status of Latin American literature. It is a classic example of the innovative literary production generated by Latin American writers in the 1960's. As I pointed out earlier, this is the period when a number of Latin American writers came from the various countries of this vast continent and created their own brand of realism and narrative techniques associated with the big "boom." The beginning of the literary "boom" appeared in the early sixties. Perhaps it began with the publication of Julio Cortázar's Hopscotch (Rayuela) in 1963, for he is regarded as the most innovative of the "boomers." Mario Vargas Llosa's The Time of the Hero (La ciudad y los perros) appeared in 1963 and was followed by The Green House (La casa verde) in 1965. However, the crowning achievement of the movement occurred in the United States in 1967, when Gabriel García Márquez' One Hundred Years of Solitude was published in Spanish. Three years later in 1970, the English translation by Gregory Rabassa, a masterful but eminently readable version, reached a new circle of readers and proved that something innovative and different was happening in the Spanish-American literary world. The novel's success on an even broader international scale has been made apparent by the numerous prizes

it has won. Literary critics have viewed this novel as the culmination and synthesis of all previous modern Hispanic literature.

One Hundred Years of Solitude exemplifies García Márquez's ingenious mixture of realism and fantasy and has resulted in the creation of a total fictional universe in which the commonplace takes on an aura of magic and the impossible is made believable. According to Edwin Williamson's brief definition, magical realism is a narrative style which consistently blurs the traditional realist distinction between fantasy and reality. Márquez's penetrating insights into the ambiguities of human nature are enhanced by a rich vein of anecdotes and leitmotifs that he taps from his private mythology. Though he clearly exudes moral indignation against brutality, exploitation, and degradation, he also delights his readers with his diffusion of tragedy and comedy and with his seductive powers of language. Besides all the fantasy and "magic realism" which is artistically interweaved in the text, One Hundred Years of Solitude is also appropiately attentive to the history and cultural traditions of Colombia, including the revolutions and catastrophes that have plagued this country.

While the novel which brought him fame, reputation, and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982 is One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967), he has also published other significant fiction: Leaf Storm (La hojarasca, 1955), In Evil Hour (La mala hora, 1962), The Autumn of the Patriarch (El otoño del patriarca, 1975), and Love in the Times of Cholera (El amor en los tiempos del cólera, 1986).

Contemporary to García Márquez is Mario Vargas Llosa. After a precocious initiation as a writer in the 1950's, Vargas Llosa has become an internationally known and mature writer in our decade. Furthermore, Vargas Llosa's popularity as a writer has opened new doors for him, especially in the political arena in Peru. He was one of the first major Peruvian writers to seek the office of the Presidency of Peru.

Vargas Llosa's literary production includes short stories, novels, plays, literary criticism, and journalistic work. Some of his critics have pointed out that in each work, the author struggles to capture the complexity inherent in diverse personal, social, and historical worlds. The structural complexities that make his novels a challenge to read also provide his readers with stories that exemplify Vargas Llosa's view on life; for him it is violent, chaotic, complex, absurd, and indefinable. His literary career reached its apex in 1959 with the publication of his first book of fiction, Los jefes (The leaders), translated in 1967 as The Cubs and Other Stories. The Time of the Hero (La ciudad y los perros) published in 1962, is his first novel. It gained him international recognition and has been translated into several languages. This novel won several literary prizes as the author presented his views and personal experiences in a fictionalized version of his years spent at the Leoncio Prado Academy, an elite military academy in Lima. Another work is The Green House (La Casa Verde, 1966) where the author involves the reader directly in the creation of the novel's plots, themes, and social concerns. Other major works include Captain Pantoja and the

Special Service (Pantaleón y las visitadoras, 1973), Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter (La Tia Julia y el Escribidor, 1977), The War at the End of the World (La guerra del fin del mundo, 1981), and The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta (Historia de Mayta, 1984). His recent novel The Storyteller (El hablador, 1987) illustrates the paradoxical reality of fictitious life with its dreams, which form an integral part of real life. This novel portrays a tribe in the Amazon, the Manchingueras, who await with religious fervor the coming of the storyteller. His latest work, Praise of the Stepmother (Elogio de la madrastra, 1988) is an erotic novel that he considers a diversion from his more serious work.

Vargas Llosa's primary objective in writing his novels was clearly stated in a personal interview with Marie-Lise Gazarian Gautier when he said; "I am interested in telling a story that will be persuasive and convincing. I want to make the novel alive and truthful" (Gazarian Gautier 335). In the creation of his texts, the novelist incorporates his personal concerns about social, political, moral, and cultural criticism to stimulate the reader's sensibility toward an understanding of certain problems. The literary corpus of Vargas Llosa reflected in his narrative does not overlook the multifaceted problems existing in Latin American societies. For him, the reason why these societies are afflicted with chaos and violence develops from the lack of communication among their citizens. The lack of information, prejudices, and tyrannical ideologies all create barriers to the resolution of economic, political, and cultural deficiencies where the benefits of democracy are slowly achieved. His works

present a variety of narrative techniques which critics have viewed from different perspectives because in each work Vargas Llosa throws light on the historical evolution of Latin America from the past and the socio-political revolution of the present from a global perspective.

To give a detailed analysis of these works is beyond the scope of this brief study; however, I hope that I have raised some interest and the desire to read the novels of these two writers among those who are not familiar with their works.

But secondary comments about Latin American Literature pale before the real thing. Here is a stirring passage from Vargas Llosa´s Conversation in The Cathedral; the description of the bar presents a grotesque, hideous, and decaying society. I quote:

> It seemed impossible that little Santiago was drinking beer now, and Ambrosio smiles, his strong greenish-yellow teeth exposed to the air: time did fly, by golly. They go up the stairs, between the vacant lots on the first block of Alfonso Ugarte there´s a white Ford garage, and at the corner on the left, faded by the inexorable grayness, the warehouses of the Central Railroad appear. A truck loaded with crates hides the door of La Catedral. Inside, under the zinc roof, crowded on rough benches and around crude tables, a noisy voracious crowd. Two Chinese in shirtleeves behind the bar watch the copper faces, the angular features that are chewing and drinking, and a frantic little man from the Andes in a shabby apron serves steaming bowls of soup,

bottles, platters of rice. Plenty of feeling, plenty of kisses, plenty of love boom from a multicolored jukebox and in the back, behind the smoke, the noise, the solid smell of food and liquor, the dancing swarms of flies, there is a punctured wall - stones, shacks, a strip of river, the leaden sky - and an ample woman bathed in sweat manipulates pots and pans surrounded by the sputter grill. There´s an empty table besides the jukebox and among the scars on the wood one can make out a heart pierced by an arrow, a woman´s name: Saturnina. (13)

The passage is rich in lyrical power and impregnated with anger at social injustice. This epitomizes the idiosyncratic interpretation and presentation of Peruvian life by the omniscent narrator as well as Santiago´s point of view and mental state. Reality is an abcess and it is destroying everyone.

Thus, I have presented a brief introduction to the status of the canon of contemporary Latin American Literature, its importance in this century, and its future in the English curriculum. Both the authors and their works are not only representatives of Latin American fiction but have also made a major contribution to the literary world. García Márquez and Vargas Llosa through their works clearly convey the Latin American writer´s desire to be modern which has been achieved in this century. Finally, the number of Latin American writers who received the Nobel Prize for Literature is perhaps proof of their modernity and their writing skill as well as their status as creators of works for international consumption. Let me conclude

by simply listing the names of these Latin American Nobel Prize winners, at least some of whom are probably familiar to the general public: Gabriela Mistral (Chile) 1946, Miguel Angel Asturias (Guatemala) 1967, Pablo Neruda (Chile) 1971, and Gabriel García Márquez (Colombia), 1983.

Notes

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the College English Association in Buffalo, New York in April 1990.

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APPENDIX

CONTEMPORARY LATIN AMERICAN FICTION: SOME WORKS IN TRANSLATION

ISABEL ALLENDE

Eva Luna. Trans. M. Sayers Peden. New York: Knopf, 1988.

Of Love and Shadows. Trans. M. Sayers Peden. New York: Knopf, 1987.

The House of Spirits. Trans. M. Bogin. New York: Knopf, 1985.

GUILLERMO CABRERA INFANTE

Infante's Inferno. Trans. S. Jill Levine and the author. New York: Harper & Row, 1984.

View of Dawn in the Tropics. Trans. S. Jill Levine. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.

Three Trapped Tigers. Trans. D. Gardner and S. Jill Levine with the author. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

JOSE DONOSO

Curfew. Trans. A. MacAdam. New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988.

A House in the Country. Trans. D. Pritchard and S. Jill Levine. New York: Knopf, 1984.

The Charleston and Other Stories. Trans. A. Conrad. Boston: Godine, 1977.

Sacred Families: Three Novellas. Trans. A. Conrad. New York: Knopf, 1977.

Obscene Bird of Night, Trans. H. St. Martin and L. Mades. New York: Knopf, 1973.

Coronation. Trans. J. Goodwin. New York: Knopf, 1965.

ROSARIO FERRÉ

The Youngest Doll and Other Stories. Trans. The author and D. Vélez. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, forthcoming.

Sweet Diamond Dust. Trans. the author. New York: Ballantine, 1989.

CARLOS FUENTES

Constancia and Other Stories for Virgins. Trans. T. Christensen. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989.

Christopher Unborn. Trans. A. MacAdam. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989.

The OLd Gringo. Trans. M. Sayers Peden and the author. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985.

Distant Relations. Trans. M. Sayers Peden. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982.

Burnt Water: Stories. Trans. M. Sayers Peden. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980.

The Hydra Head. Trans. M. Sayers Peden. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1978.

Terra Nostra. Trans. M. Sayers Peden. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1976.

"Holy Place," in Triple Cross. Trans. S. Jill Levine. New York: Dutton, 1972.

A Change of Skin. Trans. S. Hileman. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1968.

Aura. Trans. Lysander Kemp. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1965.

The Death of Artemio Cruz. Trans. S. Hileman. New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1964.

GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ

Love in the Times of Cholera. Trans. E. Grossman. New York: Knopf, 1988.

Chronicle of a Death Foretold. Trans. G. Rabassa. New York: Harper and Row, 1982.

In Evil Hour. Trans. G. Rabassa. New York: Avon Bard, 1979.

Innocent Eréndira and Other Stories. Trans. G. Rabassa. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1979.

The Autumn of the Patriarch. Trans. G. Rabassa. New York: Harper and Row, 1976.

Leaf Storm and Other Stories. Trans. G. Rabassa. New York: Harper and Row, 1972.

One Hundred Years of Solitude. Trans. G. Rabassa. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.

No One Writes to the Colonel and Other Stories. Trans. J.S. Bernstein. New York: Harper and Row, 1968.

ELENA PONIATOWSKA

Until We Meet Again. Trans. M. Bogin. New York: Pantheon, 1987.

Dear Diego. Trans. K. Silver. New York: Pantheon, 1986.

MANUEL PUIG

Pubis Angelical. Trans. E. Brunet. New York: Aventura, 1986.

Blood of Requited Love. Trans. J.L. Grayson. New York: Random, 1983.

Eternal Curse on the Reader of These Pages. Trans. the author. New York: Random, 1982.

The Kiss of the Spider Woman. Trans. T. Colchie. New York: Knopf, 1979.

The Buenos Aires Affair: A Detective Novel. Trans. S. Jill Levine. New York: Dutton, 1976.

Heart-break Tango: A Serial. Trans. S. Jill Levine. New York: Dutton, 1973.

Betrayed by Rita Hayworth. Trans. S. Jill Levine. New York: Dutton, 1971.

LUISA VALENZUELA

Open Door. Trans. H. Carpentier and J.J. Castello. Berkeley: North Point, 1988.

He Who Searches. Trans. H. R. Lane. Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive, 1987.

Other Weapons. Trans. D. Bonner. Hanover: Norte, 1985.

The Lizard's Tail. Trans. G. Rabassa. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983.

Strange Things Happen Here. Twenty-six Short Stories and a Novel. Trans. H.R. Lane. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979.

Clara: Thirteen Short Stories and a Novel. Trans. H. Carpentier and J.J. Costello. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976.

MARIO VARGAS LLOSA

In Praise of the Stepmother. Trans. H.R. Lane. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1990.

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